European Commission: Consultation on the social and societal aspects of the information society Work programme to protect consumer interests in the information society

IRIS 1996-8:1/3

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On 25 July 1996, the European Commission published its Green Paper "Living and Working in the Information Society: People First". The Green Paper is based upon the work of two main groups which were established by the Commission in 1995. A High Level Group of Experts began its work in May 1995 and presented its preliminary report "Building the Information Society for us all" in January 1996 (see IRIS 1996-3: 3). In parallel, the Commission created an Information Society Forum, which is broadly based and consists of 128 members. The Forum's first annual report was adopted in June 1996 (see elsewhere in this issue). The Green Paper examines how information and communication technologies are reshaping production and work organisation and are transforming people's lives.

On the basis of the Green Paper, the European Commission will launch wide consultation on the social deficits raised by the transition towards the information society. The consultation will be launched on the occasion of the symposium that the Irish Presidency of the EU Council is organising on 30 September and 1 October 1996 in Dublin. The consultation will involve the European institutions, Member States, employers, trade unions and nongovernmental organisations. The deadline for observations is 31 December 1996, after which the Commission intends to submit its proposals for action.

In addition, Ms Emma Bonino, European Commissioner responsible for consumer policy, established 10 priority actions, which are laid down in the Commission's work programme consumer policy 1996-98, to minimize the risks and maximize the potential benefits of the information society for consumers. The Commissioner suggests actions in the following fields: 1. Legal framework:

- analysis of existing consumer legislation to assess how far the provisions of various EC Directives can be extended to cover the situations arising in the information society (plus a rapid adoption of the distance selling directive, see IRIS 1996-1: 5);

- providing for fair, cheap and quick resolution of consumer complaints and redress against suppliers. 2. Carrier responsibility:

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- protection of minors: determination of whether measures should be taken at Community level or leave up to individual groups the care of filtering information supplied by electronic transmission services;

- protection of privacy in the new media: enlarging data protection already guaranteed at Community level to adapt it to market practices; 3. Social issues: guaranteeing accessibility of all to services of the information society at a reasonable cost; 4. Policy-making: respecting the principle of subsidiarity through close collaboration between the Commission and consumer organizations, and consulting consumers themselves.

European Commission, 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First', Green Paper, COM(96) 389.

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1996:0389:FIN:EN:PDF

'Networks for People and their Communities. Making the Most of the Information Society in the European Union.' First Annual Report to the European Commission from the Information Society Forum, June 1996.

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